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Student Teaching in the Contact Zone

Learning to Teach Amid Multiple Interests in a Vocational English Class

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This case study investigates the decision making of Joni, a high school English teacher, during her student teaching in an Applied Communications II teaching assignment, comprised of students in the lowest tier of a four-track senior English curriculum. This course served as a "contact zone" for a set of competing interests: Joni's stated beliefs about effective teaching based on her experiences as a student, the Applied Communications curriculum, the student-centered pedagogy advocated by her university professors and supervisor, and the students' beliefs about the Applied Communications curriculum. The analysis finds that Joni's student teaching was complicated by the different values of the various stakeholders who converged in her classroom, producing disagreement about the motive of the activity setting of her student teaching. The study concludes with a consideration of both the purpose of vocational English classes and the preparation that novice teachers receive to teach them.

Keywords: *teacher thinking; teacher education; contact zone; tracking; beginning teachers*

In his study of a university's first-year composition program, Durst (1999) describes the "collision course" that instructors and students travel when they arrive with very different beliefs about the *raison d'être* for the class. At the University of Cincinnati, the site of his research, many students take a pragmatic view of their college education, matriculating to elevate their station in society. First-year composition, in these students' view, should have a utilitarian emphasis, teaching them writing skills that will help them succeed in their upper-level coursework and ultimate careers.

The first-year composition instructors, however, typically adopt a critical theory stance toward writing pedagogy. Rather than simply teaching students how to write in accordance with college expectations, they take a more political perspective in which they instruct their students to use writing as a means to critique and transform society into a more equitable place. Often, this effort involves requiring students to critique their own privilege. This emphasis, in the view of many students, assumes of them a privilege that they do not believe that

they have and further provides for the course a purpose they believe it ought not have. These competing assumptions and interests, argues Durst (1999), make first-year composition courses problematic in terms of the various stakeholders' beliefs about what is appropriate for the class's curriculum, instruction, direction, and assessment.

The intersection of oppositional interests in a social setting has been described by Pratt (1999) as a *contact*

zone. To Pratt, contact zones are sites where members of different cultures "meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (p. 76). The examples Pratt provides are often extreme in this regard, such as the inequitable relationship between master and slave. However, more nuanced versions of a contact zone are often in evidence in schools, where a host of relationships—often involving people of disproportionate power—intersect in complex ways. At times such a nexus of competing values and interests provides the site for the violence implied by Durst's (1999) "collision" metaphor or Pratt's "clash" of values. At other times, however, the different conceptions of the classroom's purpose provide for a more subtle, less cataclysmic convergence of interests.

In this study, we investigate a student teacher's pedagogy in a 12th grade English class called Applied Communications. The class was designed to teach vocational-track students both a literature-oriented curriculum and the skills they presumably needed to find jobs and succeed in the workforce. We analyze teacher candidate Joni's experiences in relation to the four primary perspectives that intersect, interact, and come into conflict in her teaching of the Applied Communications class: (a) Joni's stated beliefs about effective teaching based on her experiences as a student, (b) the Applied Communications curriculum as interpreted by her mentor teacher, (c) the student-centered pedagogy advocated by her university professors and supervisor, and (d) the students' reported beliefs about the appropriateness and usefulness of the Applied Communications curriculum. In light of these interests, we explore the following research question: What are the consequences for Joni's teaching as a result of the ways in which she acknowledges and interprets these four perspectives?

Theoretical Framework

Leont'ev's (1981; cf. Wertsch, 1985) account of the *motive of a setting* provides a useful construct for understanding the dynamics of a contact zone (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999). Borrowing terms from Sarason (1972), Wertsch (1985), and others, we refer to the contexts that mediate the development of consciousness as *activity settings.* Lave (1988) makes a distinction between an *arena*, which has visible structural features, and a *setting*, which represents the individual's construal of that arena. Thus, although two teachers may work at the same arena (e.g., a school or English department), they may have distinctly different understandings of it based on their own goals, histories, and activities. They thus experience the same arena as different settings.

When a teacher candidate is subservient to both the university's and the school's priorities during student teaching, there is great potential for an educational arena to become a contact zone in which different conceptions of setting come in conflict.

As outlined by Cole (1996), settings are *proleptic*; that is, established assumptions about appropriate social futures implicitly shape people's present action to bring about those very futures. Rheingold and Cook (1975), for instance, found that parents often both anticipate and help to construct their children's gendered futures, decorating boys' rooms with transportation motifs and other worldly pursuits and girls' rooms with dolls, lace, and other domesticalia. The shaping of children's environments by adults projects a life trajectory that is often reinforced across the many settings in which young people are socialized into appropriate adult roles. This sense of optimal outcome, both for individuals and whole social groups, has been described by Wertsch (2000) as *teleological*; that is, having a sense of design toward a preferred purpose. The constructs of telos and prolepsis suggest that every social setting has a *motive* (Leont'ev, 1981), or broad social destination, that is continually encouraged through both explicit and implicit means. At the same time, the notion of a contact zone suggests that this official or predominant motive may be contested by those who are outside the power structure.

Merging the goals of various stakeholders into a common motive is highly complex. Multiple and competing goals and destinations often coexist within a setting, although typically the goals of the most powerful people and groups predominate. The motive for a setting, then, while not specifying the actions that take place, provides channels that encourage particular ways of thinking and acting, and discourage others. Student teaching illustrates the ways in which a setting may accommodate diverse and sometimes antagonistic goals, with schools and universities often envisioning different roles for the teacher. Student teaching often becomes a setting in which different stakeholders vie for control over the instructional approach, resulting in a *two-worlds pitfall* for teacher candidates (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985) in which they must be responsive to the demands of competing interests. Further, another set of stakeholders, the students, may invest the arena with other goals and expectations, resulting in classrooms in which, while an official destination is operationalized in a curriculum, the sense of setting and attendant goals constructed by different participants may be at odds and come in conflict.

Our study of Joni's teaching in an Applied Communications class employs the construct of the activity-setting-as-contact-zone as a lens for understanding

her decision-making during student teaching. We next outline how this theoretical framework has provided us with the terms and concepts through which we collected and analyzed the data for our study.

Method

Data Collection

The research design as a whole was conceived by the first author along with his colleagues Pamela Grossman and Sheila Valencia as part of research conducted through funding acquired by the Center on English Learning and Achievement (CELA) from the U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement. The research team for this study collected the following data.

Data not formally analyzed. Some data sources were not subjected to a formal analysis. We consulted these data to provide the context of the investigation. For example, information about the teacher education program emerged in Joni's gateway interview, our interviews with her professors and supervisors, and the concept maps that the students produced for the research. We extracted what we saw as germane to the focus of this study and included it in our account. The following sources were employed for such purposes:

1. We conducted a *gateway interview with Joni* during which she spoke in response to questions in the following categories: her apprenticeship of observation (i.e., what she had learned about teaching based on her experiences as a student; see Lortie, 1975), her personal philosophy and conceptions about teaching, her preservice coursework, and her field experiences prior to student teaching (data collected by the first author).
2. We conducted *interviews with Joni's university English education professors* about their experiences as teachers and their approach to teacher education (data collected by the third author).
3. We conducted *interviews with Joni's mentor teacher and university supervisor* at different points during her student teaching (data collected by the third author).
4. We solicited *two group concept maps* produced by the cohort of research participants before and after student teaching (data collected by the first author).
5. Joni provided us with *curriculum documents* and *planning books* that influenced her decisions about teaching (data collected by the third author).

Data subjected to formal analysis. The formal analysis was conducted on data collected during three *observation cycles.* An observation cycle consists of a preobservation interview, two classroom observations recorded via field notes, and a postobservation interview (data collected by the third author).

Data Analysis

We developed a coding system derived from prior work in this line of inquiry to identify the pedagogical tools that Joni emphasized in her student teaching (e.g., Bickmore, Smagorinsky, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2005; Smagorinsky, Sanford, & Konopak, 2006; Smagorinsky, Wright, Augustine, O'Donnell-Allen, & Konopak, 2007). This coding system is grounded in a Vygotskian perspective on teaching and learning that views human development to be a consequence of goal-directed, tool-mediated action in social context (Wertsch, 1985). The codes employed for this study focused on the pedagogical tools that Joni used in her teaching and the source she identified for learning how to use each (i.e., the *attribution* for each tool coded). By "tools" we mean those implements—tangible or psychological—through which she enacted her practice (see Grossman et al., 1999), such as a worksheet, a small group activity, a game format, and other means for instructing students.

The observation cycle interviews and field notes were read and analyzed by the first and second authors. Each tool was coded for the name of the tool and the attribution Joni provided for where she learned of the tool and how to use it. We identified the following major categories for our codes:

1. *Open-ended:* This code describes occasions when Joni provided instruction that allowed students to take their own directions with their learning, such as when they interpreted stories through drawings. In response to open-ended teaching, students could represent their knowledge in idiosyncratic ways.
2. *Orthodox—academic:* We used the term *orthodox* to account for teaching decisions that required of students a "straight" response (consistent with the Greek term *ortho*'s root)—that is, conforming to an established expectation. Joni's use of orthodox teaching in the academic area came when she stressed correctness in students' use of language, structure of writing, accuracy in recalling information, and other areas of conformity to received knowledge.
3. *Orthodox—behavioral:* We coded data as orthodox behavioral teaching when Joni attempted to teach proper conduct, especially in relation to the vocational dimensions of the curriculum, such as using a proper handshake, filling out job applications accurately, dressing properly, and demonstrating other aspects of expected workplace behavior.
4. *Attribution:* We applied this code whenever Joni identified a pedagogical tool, for example, workbooks,

journal writing, and others elaborated in Table 1. Throughout the interviews Joni would be prompted to attribute her pedagogical tools to a source such as her mentor teacher or her university professors. Attributions for orthodox teaching and behavior were typically made to influences at the site of student teaching: her cooperating teacher, the curriculum materials, and so on. Attributions for open-ended teaching were more likely to be made to her teacher education course work or herself as the originator of ideas.

Table 1 charts the frequency of each specific tool found within the *open-ended*, *orthodox-academic*, and *orthodox-behavioral* categories.

Context of the Investigation

Participant

Joni was a native of small, rural community of about 1,000 residents in a Midwestern state. When her stepfather was transferred to a city in the Deep South during Joni's senior year of high school, she completed her senior year in the Midwest, and then moved south to join her family. After working for a semester, she enrolled in and received her associate's degree from the local 2-year college, after which she transferred to her state's namesake university where she graduated with an English major. She then immediately enrolled in a master's degree in English education program, which awarded her a teaching credential.

In various interviews Joni discussed the kind of teacher she did and did not want to be. Good teachers from her past, she said, "did all different types of things . . . and let you kind of explore on your own." She preferred "teachers who take the time to read my work. . . . I like it when they respond to me and tell me what I did wrong or tell me when I did right." In contrast, she did not like teachers who "made it really hard." One memorable teacher, she said, was "real cognitive. . . . She had her hair in a bun, you know, real—oh, she was mean. She was so mean. . . . She gave out homework like crazy. She graded really hard." This teacher emphasized grammar instruction heavily; "We didn't do that much writing in school," said Joni.

When asked to describe what she meant by "cognitive," a term she repeated several times, Joni said that it referred to teachers who "were the really strict ones. . . . They give a lot of homework; they're this way, they're not going to change, go by the book, read the book, lecture from the book types." Such instruction, said Joni, "really bores me."

Table 1
Frequency of Each Specific Tool Found Within the Code Categories

Code	Frequency
Tools	
Open-ended teaching	
Collaborative learning	12
Differentiating instruction	2
Making learning fun/relevant (game review format)	6
Multiple intelligences	7
Writing—personal (journal, autobiography, poetry)	12
Orthodox teaching—academic	
Assessment (quiz/test/test review/reading check/homework)	16
Literary terms	4
Reading in class	6
Vocabulary	11
Workbook exercises	2
Writing—academic (essay, literary analysis, research, summaries, discussion question answers)	3
Writing—form (paragraphs, sentences, models)	2
Orthodox teaching—behavioral	
Character traits	6
Cultural codes	19
Discipline	3
Life skills instruction	15
Vocational teaching/learning[a]	81
Attribution	
Colleague	3
Cooperating teacher	48
Curriculum materials	33
Mandate	4
Self	23
Students	6
Teacher education course work	6

a. Using a computer, hearing guest speakers, interview rehearsals, reading job-oriented newspaper articles, making presentations, doing projects, planning careers, writing résumé, writing thank you letters, and writing job applications.

Joni further reported that "I don't like worksheets [or] a lot of lecturing, and I cannot lecture. . . . That's the way most of my [high school] teachers taught, was a lot of lecturing. . . . You took notes." Her content-area college professors also lectured, with students "sitting there taking notes for an hour. . . . Not too much group work in class." From her apprenticeship of observation as a student, then, Joni stated a preference for open-ended instruction with personal attention, which was the exception to the orthodox norm. She further expressed a disdain for student passivity, preferring instead opportunities to explore topics in personal ways. She was unambiguous about not wanting to be the sort of "cognitive bun lady" whose strict, unyielding command of the classroom left little room for student inquiry.

Teacher Education Program

Joni was part of a cohort group of 20 preservice teachers, consisting primarily of undergraduate students but including a small group who, like Joni, sought a master's degree with certification. Her two English education professors required each member of her cohort group to take a year-long field experience under the guidance of a mentor teacher. (Neither of these professors is among this study's authors.) During this field experience the cohort group members spent 12 hours a week in the school throughout the fall semester and did their formal student teaching during the spring semester, all in the classroom of their mentor teacher.

The student-centered nature of the university program was revealed in the drawing of the two collaborative concept maps that the cohort of 7 participants produced before and after student teaching. On both occasions the teacher candidates literally placed students at the center of their drawings, surrounded by words that represented the cultures in which they were immersed. The task they were given was to draw a map that conceptualized their understanding of teaching; on both occasions, however, Joni and her cohort members interpreted the task in terms of who students are and what surrounds them.

Community, School, and Applied Communications Curriculum

Joni did her student teaching at West Bend High School, the only high school in a rural county of roughly 46,000 residents. The county's median home value was $98,700, and the per capita income was $18,350. Of the school district's 1,321 students, 1,040 were European American, 176 were African American, 57 were Asian American, 46 were Latino/a American, and 2 were Native American. A total of 29% of the district's students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The community as a whole was considered by many to be socially and politically conservative. It was the site, for instance, of a dispute over whether or not the Biblical *Ten Commandments* could be displayed in front of the county court house; and at the time of the data collection, Sunday liquor sales were not allowed.

Joni's mentor teacher was Debbie Johnson, a White female who was in her 24th year of teaching, 6 at West Bend High School. The Applied Communication class that Joni taught did not have a specific curriculum, and so, said Debbie, was "not as strict as [what] we do in the other classes. So there's somewhat freedom there." Joni concurred with regard to the relatively unprescribed nature of the curriculum, saying that "It's pretty open, and you can do what you want with it."

The class we focused on during Joni's student teaching was called Applied Communications II, which was housed in the discipline of English and primarily enrolled 12th graders. The course was offered in the lowest of the school's four tracks. Debbie said that beneath the Advanced Placement/gifted, college preparation, and average tracks were the

> Applied Communications students who are hopefully tech[nical] school bound, maybe someday. Probably the majority of them, though, will go into the work force next year, so we try to spend a lot of time [on workforce preparation], and I think it's real important for them to be ready for that. So [we teach] all kinds of communications skills, which is what this English is all about. . . . [The students] are all vocational because Applied Communications doesn't count [toward graduation] for the college prep students.

The curriculum focused on communication skills in life and the workplace. Joni said,

> The class is centered more around workplace things, such as writing résumés, deciding on a career, things like that. . . . They also work in the literature book but just not as much as a normal literature class would. . . . The main concept they're supposed to get in the class is how important . . . good communication is in life and the workplace. And they do that through learning about negotiation skills, good customer service. But I don't— that's the main goal, but I also think they need to know like the life skills, these things they need to know to get by in life, which I guess are communication skills too. . . . They don't really know how to read for pleasure, a lot of them. So we're working on trying to get them to at least like or hopefully love [reading].

The class included 10 European American girls, 8 European boys, and 1 African American boy. Field notes described informal conversations in which girls discussed their pregnancies and boys talked about their impending parenthood, students exchanged notes on their probation conditions and officers, and the students initiated other topics that suggested their rough-and-tumble station in life.

Results

Our findings suggest that during Joni's student teaching, four sets of interests converged in ways that were not always compatible: those of her university teacher-education program, those she stated about her own beliefs about students and teaching, those implied by the Applied Communications curriculum and how her

mentor teacher interpreted it, and those provided through her students' construction of the setting. We organize the results around the three observation cycles. Within each, we first describe the instruction observed. We then discuss the observations in terms of the degree to which we coded for *open-ended*, *orthodox-academic*, and *orthodox-behavioral* pedagogical tools.

Observation Cycle #1

Summary of the Instruction Observed

The observations for the first cycle came on March 2 and March 9. On March 2 Joni focused on an etymology project, with attention to other assignments interspersed in the 88-minute block period. The class observed was a continuation of the previous day's lesson, when Joni assigned an article on slang, which she followed with an activity in which she gave the students a definition, and the students responded with the appropriate word. Following 15 minutes of Silent Sustained Reading (SSR), she provided the students with a four-page handout that guided the students through a process for looking up words in different reference books. The class went to the school library to work on this project. After returning to the class, Joni planned to do a "visualization" project on Lois Lowry's young adult utopian novel *The Giver*—an activity she attributed to her university professors in which students would draw scenes or incidents from the book—but the students persuaded her to adjust the activity so that it resembled the U.S. television game show *Win, Lose, or Draw* (originally broadcast from 1987 to 1990) in which they competed as two teams to depict scenes on the chalkboard that Joni identified from the novel.

The next day, the class returned to the library to complete the etymology assignment. They then began a new etymology project in which they worked in groups to construct a "visual aid" with a word they picked from a hat. The students used construction paper and various decorations—drawings, computer images, and so on—to depict the word, its origins, and how the word's definition might have changed over time. Each group then presented its project to the class.

The second observation in this cycle took place 1 week later. The lesson centered on a quiz on *The Giver* and a review for a midterm test on job interviews, posture, customer service, nonverbal communication, and listening strategies. The test review was conducted by means of crossword puzzles and flash cards. The review was upset when an administrative aide called a student into the hallway and told her that her mother had died of cancer, causing great distress among Joni and the students

and disruption in the instruction as the girl was comforted. The grief-stricken girl was ultimately driven home by a classmate. The final part of the class was dedicated to introducing students to apartment listings to help them learn what is involved in renting an apartment: leasing, choosing amenities, and matching apartment layouts to lifestyle. Joni acknowledged in the postobservation interview that she was deeply shaken by the news of the mother's death and uncertain about how to conduct class after the incident.

Pedagogical Tools

Open-ended teaching. The etymology project demonstrated open-ended teaching through evidence of influence from the university's progressive emphasis and from Joni's own stated values based on her apprenticeship of observation. Students worked in groups and drew on a variety of sources for images to depict their word's origins, meanings, and usage. They similarly employed nonverbal communication through the visualization activity that Joni planned for *The Giver*, during which she showed flexibility and attention to the students' interests by adjusting the activity to their preferred *Win, Lose, or Draw* format.

Orthodox teaching—behavioral. The etymology lesson came from the Applied Communications curriculum and reflected its orthodox orientation. In addition to the vocabulary knowledge it was designed to teach, the lesson, in Joni's words, served to promote particular dispositions often associated with low-track instruction. She said, for instance, that the students were assessed according to

> If they understood what they were supposed to do or not, especially following directions for the presentation. That was the main part of it, so I can see . . . if they follow the directions, and if they can get up in front and talk with people and work in groups.

As Joni's remarks suggest, the etymology lesson was designed to serve the Applied Communications curriculum in several ways beyond its academic intent. Following directions comprised the "main part" of the assessment for the students' projects and presentations; students were thus rewarded for their demonstrations of character as envisioned in the low-track curriculum (see Smagorinsky & Taxel, 2005, for an account of the ways in which a character curriculum is often aimed at normalizing the behavior of low-income students according to middle-class values).

Further, Joni implied or stated the importance of such character traits as perseverance and ambition in outlining

her expectations for the students in her assessment on *The Giver*: "Can they stay on task, which we're having a hard time with. . . . The quizzes help assess if they can stay on task. . . . If they turn in extra credit, you know they have some ambition." Here Joni described the ways in which literary study was oriented to helping the students complete tasks and aspire to go beyond the minimum work quota. In the context of the Applied Communications curriculum, literature lessons served at least in part as vehicles for promoting dispositions. We infer that task completion itself was regarded and rewarded as a virtue and thus evidence of orthodox behavior.

The students' perspective was evident in Joni's teaching of *The Giver*, a novel that the students resisted reading:

> The thing they've had to struggle with the most has probably been the novel, *The Giver*. In the very beginning I fought them tooth and nail to read it. . . . The second day or third day that I assigned it they said, "We hate it, we don't like to read, we don't want to read, this book doesn't make any sense, it's too hard." . . . I had a few that were saying, "I love it. It's really easy. I don't know why they're saying that." So those few kept me going. And most of them—I would say probably two-thirds of the class are okay with it now. [They] either read it because I told them to, or they read it because they like it. So it's just getting them to read that is the hardest part. And I had to learn that I have to do quizzes. I didn't want to do quizzes, but I have to do them.

As Joni noted, the students' reading of *The Giver* included an emphasis on how to persevere even with tasks that they disliked. The curriculum of the Applied Communications class thus stressed character traits of a particular kind: those designed to prepare students to persist with tasks whether they found them fulfilling or not. The students' resistance to the novel, then, provided an occasion for them to demonstrate other virtues so that the students who liked the book, and thus helped Joni herself persevere with the instruction, served as models for the other students to gravitate toward.

Observation Cycle #2

Summary of the Instruction Observed

Observations in the second cycle took place on March 22 and 23. The first class centered on a lesson in what Joni called "elements of poetry." She began with an overhead transparency that listed the elements (tone, mood, diction, figures of speech, repetition, rhyme, symbol, theme, and imagery), defined them, and give examples of each. The next overhead, "Taking a Closer Look at Figurative Language," included three columns: types,

definitions, and examples. Students generated their own examples of the different types of figurative language, which Joni said would help them find figurative language in the next activity. Students then got in groups with a packet of poems on the theme of war while Joni put questions on the overhead for them to answer. The questions required students to identify the poem's title, the poem's speaker, three types of figurative language within the poem, the speaker's reaction to war, and the students' personal response to the poem. After the groups completed the assignment, the students worked individually to write dialogue poems in response to pictures of war that Joni distributed. Each poem needed at least two characters speaking at least five lines apiece.

On March 23 the class began with 15 minutes of SSR, following which Joni led a discussion of students' associations with love, which she catalogued on an overhead transparency. She then passed out packets of poems centered on the theme of love and used the overhead projector to provide students with questions to answer in groups. The questions asked students to identify the mood of each poem, two types of figurative language in each, whether they had experienced emotions similar to those of each poem's speaker, and whether the speaker justified his or her feelings of love in each poem. Joni read each poem, pausing to pose questions about both the elements of poetry and the students' feelings in response to the poems. She then introduced haiku poems and required each student to write a haiku about love; some students read their poems to the class. After concluding this lesson, Joni began a showing of the 1957 Sidney Lumet film of Reginald Rose's *Twelve Angry Men*.

Pedagogical Tools

Open-ended teaching. "I don't want to be the little lady with the stick up in front of the room," said Joni in relation to the lesson in poetry reading that she taught during this observation cycle. We found this remark to be resonant with her earlier statement that she detested "cognitive" teachers with their hair in a bun, those who are personally unpleasant and interpersonally insensitive to young people and how they experience school.

Joni was given a free hand in designing this curriculum under Debbie's guidance, including how she would teach poetry, a topic that Debbie encouraged. Joni chose poetry that she believed students would read because of its brevity, and she made a concerted effort to select themes (war, love) that she thought would appeal to her class of reluctant readers. She worked diligently on her choice of poems, using the university library collections to select a range of perspectives on the topics. Joni said that she wanted to

Emphasize war and how horrible it can be and show some of the different voices of war. Everything from like the war bride to the soldier to someone protesting the war. And show them like what dialogue poems were and how to write them. And then today we . . . brainstormed just different words they thought of when they thought of love, so it helped to get them thinking on that. They read different poems, again different voices from people that were against love and hated it, to all being love and mushy, different aspects of that.

Joni's effort to find literature that she thought the students might find compelling suggests that she fore-grounded student interest and engagement when select-ing literature and designing instruction for her students.

These values, developed during her own experiences as a student, mapped well onto the perspective of her university teacher-education program. Joni's instruction included the sort of generative, constructivist activities encouraged at the university. She promoted open-ended responses to poetry and included strategic instruction in the form of the heuristic for how to read a poem. She further included group work as part of a scaffolding sequence. Her incorporation of such teaching methods in her second observation cycle instruction suggests that, in addition to the expectations for students and their oppor-tunities for advancement in workforce hierarchies, she believed that they were capable of open-ended, genera-tive, constructive work.

Joni demonstrated expectations for her students that exceeded what the curriculum presumed—along with what we considered to be complex instructional planning—in her execution of the poetry unit. Given Debbie's encour-agement to design the unit as she pleased, Joni said that she selected war poetry because the students would benefit from engagement with its themes:

That generation, my generation probably included, we—it's not like a real thing for us. We haven't really gone through it other than like Desert Storm [the 1990-1991 invasion of Iraq] and small stuff but never [inaudible] Vietnam or World War I or II. [Note: The data collection took place prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.] So I thought that would help them kind of relate to it or get to know more about how horrible it was because they don't understand. I don't understand probably. So that was my—one of the reasonings. And I tried to find poetry that was from different perspectives. Like either someone's in the war or had like a war bride or have people that just watched it, like a photographer type of thing, all different perspectives. [I wanted to include] more than just the soldiers.

Here Joni described instruction that was designed to engage students with the literature and its themes, an effort that we associated with Deweyian progressivism (e.g., Dewey, 1916) and its emphasis on learners' per-sonal development within social contexts.

Joni also revealed higher expectations for the students in terms of their writing. In thinking back on the lesson, she said of the students' poetry writing, "They were really cute. So I think that went over well. And they were excited to share those also, more than just the usual people" who contribute in class. She said further that the Applied Communications students were

not known really for their writing skills, but they wrote awesome poetry. It was wonderful. I had kids bring in poetry they had written, you know, outside of class and it was really good. I have actually a whole anthology of their poems from last time. . . . I want to get it bound and everything [inaudible] when I get around to it, and I sent some of them in to get published, too. . . . They were so great. It was really—I was really excited. So that's why I'm trying [inaudible]. I mean, they would complain every time I ask them to write anything, but poetry, I guess, to them is short, sweet.

Joni did not employ such terms as "cute," "awesome," "wonderful," "great," and "excited" to describe the students' response to the other aspects of the Applied Communications curriculum; rather, students "hated" the work, had a "hard time" completing it, and demon-strated character by finishing the tasks that engendered such antipathy.

Orthodox teaching—behavioral. The Applied Communications curriculum had its influence in Joni's selection of texts and means of assessing students' knowledge. Joni explained that they watched the film *Twelve Angry Men* "because it went along with like negotiation skills like that for the workplace," a state-ment of alignment between the literary study and the vocational emphasis of the curriculum. The drama, which is widely reprinted in literature anthologies, was selected not for its potential for exploring themes (see Ragsdale & Smagorinsky, 2005) but for its value in modeling a favorable workplace disposition.

Orthodox teaching—academic. Following the con-structivist emphasis of the poetry lesson, the more high stakes assessment she provided at the unit's end evaluated the students on their factual recall items of the sort found at the low end of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy in the cogni-tive domain. Joni said, in describing this assessment,

We'll have a poetry quiz or test over all the stuff—not over all the stuff, just like the basics, like the terms, fig-urative language, and then maybe some of the poems

that we all read together. . . . The first part is, I believe, the elements, imagery and creative language. Just matching the definitions, words and definitions. And the second part is—actually I gave them a poem to read and discuss, "Prayer to Laughter." They're going to read that poem and answer questions and find the figurative language and define imagery.

The final assessment thus required the memorization of definitions of literary elements and the ability to identify the elements in a given poem. We classified such instruction as *Orthodox Teaching—Academic* because it fit with the notion that education consists of the completion of given tasks and because of its assumption that vocational track students in Applied Communications and other low-track academic courses could meet academic expectations by recalling rather than constructing knowledge.

Observation Cycle #3

Summary of the Instruction Observed

The third observation cycle included field notes from April 22 and April 23. The lessons focused on the vocational curriculum of Applied Communications. The class began with SSR, followed by a brief discussion of what kind of clothing is appropriate for a job interview. Joni passed out job applications that the students had begun filling out the previous day and led the students through a line-by-line approach to completing them so as to meet the expectations of employers. She collected them and distributed a handout titled "Questions Frequently Asked at the Job Interview," which she reviewed with the students line by line. Students wrote answers to each question, and Joni collected their responses.

On April 23 the students got into a circle, and each shared an article about the workplace that he or she had found in a newspaper or magazine. While the students were still in a circle, Joni returned their answers from the day before to them and asked them to complete the assignment. When done, the students worked in pairs to conduct mock interviews with one another.

Pedagogical Tools

Orthodox teaching—behavioral. In this observation cycle Joni worked exclusively on the job preparation curriculum. The students worked on résumés, filled in job applications, and prepared for mock job interviews conducted with local business people. Through the interview preparation the students learned codes of power that they might not be familiar with, suggesting that the instruction

was preparing them for participation in a new and different culture. Joni said that the people conducting the interviews were "real business people" who "do the interview, step through it like you normally would. But then instead of saying we'll hire or fire, they kind of evaluate how [the students] did everything, how they dressed, how they spoke, how they answered questions."

Joni's described her instruction in the expectations of the professional workplace in her account of the lessons on interview preparation:

> We typed up the résumés, and they saved them on disks, and I'll probably go ahead and print those out today and show them tomorrow if they want to see them. We're going to do the final draft of the job applications tomorrow and then after we get those finished, we'll probably go on over how to answer different interview questions. . . . Then I have another sheet that has actual questions and they'll have to write out the answers. . . . Things we'll work on probably are how to answer questions, what are your strengths and weaknesses. . . . And we'll probably talk more about body language. And one thing we need to work on is the handshake, how to do that properly. . . . One more thing we're going to work on if we get to is what types of questions you should ask the interviewer.

Through this account Joni revealed a paradox of the Applied Communications curriculum. A primary goal was to prepare students for service-level jobs and the formalities of getting them. To make this shift, students needed to learn whole new ways of dressing and behaving, from the development of a résumé to the grasp of a handshake. The field notes further report that Joni "tells them that guys need to wear a tie this year. [One student] wants to know what color of shoes he should wear with his pants. . . . She cautions them not to put that they couldn't get along as a reason for leaving" a prior position. These behaviors would be assessed by local business people who might conduct such interviews, who would provide "a check sheet sort of thing telling us how they do. It'll have a thing like how they dressed, how they spoke, correct grammar, all those types of things." Joni further stated that she tried "to emphasize that you need to know exactly what you're going to say and be ready to say it because sometimes what comes out of your mouth isn't always what you planned to say." Among those unfortunate spontaneous statements from students' mouths might be an admission that they had left a job because of difficulties, a sign that they might challenge authority in the new work setting.

Many students regarded such preparation as irrelevant to their job prospects. A number of them already held

jobs of the sort that their friends and family members regarded as career work—working in auto body shops, waiting tables, and occupying other blue-collar positions. Joni was thus in the position of teaching students the codes, practices, and rituals that they would need for entry-level service positions, while the students contended that such knowledge was irrelevant to the kinds of jobs they sought and the procedures they had used to secure them. In their experience, people got jobs using informal procedures learned through the funds of knowledge (Moll & Greenberg, 1990) available in community life: knowing someone who needed an employee, working for a relative, and otherwise using social networks to find employment. Joni believed that the students did not "understand the seriousness of the résumé and the job application. So we're trying to emphasize that and what you need to be able to do it to get a good job." Yet, she reported, the students typically responded to this instruction by complaining that "We already know. We've been through this."

Joni herself was caught in the middle of the different expectations that she, the curriculum, and the students had for the students' preparation for the workforce. She reported that she both enjoyed her students and found their lack of commitment to academics frustrating. Generally, she described them as "the student normally who's either going to like a two-year technical type school or directly into the work force." She expressed affection for them, saying that "It takes a lot sometimes to get them interested. But they're real cool kids. They're a lot more interesting, I think, than the normal class. They're really relaxed and cool." She said, "It's a very different kind of class. It's a lot more fun, a lot of fun, because you have a lot more leeway, I think, with teaching. They're a challenge sometimes but they're fun. . . . They're like little kindergartners . . . really rambunctious. . . . talkative."

This enjoyment of the students was tempered by her sense of distance from their cultural backgrounds and subsequent dispositions toward school. As a college-oriented student throughout her education, Joni had trouble at times comprehending the students' stated goal of seeking employment in the blue collar workforce immediately following graduation from high school:

> They're just a different type of kid that I didn't grow up around. I always was the [inaudible] college student. So I act differently around them, I guess. I'm always careful not to throw the whole college thing on them and say how wonderful it is. I kind of have to—I don't want to say go down to their level but sometimes I do because I'm an avid reader. I like to read, and most of them don't.

We found no evidence that Joni resolved her ambivalence toward her students during her year in Debbie's classroom. Joni reported that Debbie "doesn't give her other classes much homework but [assigns] pretty much no homework [in Applied Communications]. And I'm afraid the reason they don't do homework is because no one expects them to do it." Joni thus appeared troubled that the students had been conditioned throughout their schooling to accept low expectations for their academic performance, yet also revealed herself to be cautious about offering her own collegiate orientation as a possible social future out of fear of alienating her students further from her own cultural background and status. She thus appeared to participate reluctantly in what she regarded as providing low expectations for her students. That is, she felt that expectations regarding students' willingness to do homework eventually would handicap them in terms of their potential for status and earnings, yet had a difficult time creating what she believed to be higher expectations for their academic performance.

These conflicted feelings were evident in Joni's remarks about what she anticipated her students would need following graduation. Even though she was only a few years older than many of her high school seniors, she noticed a difference between herself and what she described as "kids today":

> I hate to say that, but they have a problem with customer service type issues or negotiating. So I think they learn a lot from [the curriculum]. We're trying to get them to understand the importance of customer service, being nice to people, because a lot of them will say, you know, "I don't care," but they learn soon enough.

We infer from this statement that Joni anticipated that students needed to learn new dispositions in order to succeed in the workforce. In particular, she shared the curriculum's assumption that they would work in relatively low-level occupations in which deference to authority—in this example, the authority of customers in a commercial environment—was a beneficial trait, one that they needed to learn in order to have successful work experiences. Yet the students complained that this preparation was not necessary for the futures they saw for themselves, which they envisioned as willing participation in the blue-collar work network to which their friends and relatives provided them entrée.

Discussion

The assignment of young teachers in their first jobs (Peske & Haycock, 2006; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005) or

teachers perceived as less effective (Anagnostopoulos, 2003) to low-track classes is a well-known phenomenon in the world of education. If teaching assignments indeed contribute to the ways in which early-career teachers learn to teach (Troen & Boles, 2003), then this tendency undoubtedly affects the conceptions of teaching that early-career teachers develop. Although university-based teacher educators have no control over their graduates' ultimate teaching assignments, they surely must be concerned that teachers' initial socialization into the profession—in low-track classes that are often taught according to a fragmented, orthodox curriculum (Applebee, Burroughs, & Stevens, 2000)—often works at odds with the Deweyan principles that are emphasized on university campuses.

Joni's process of concept development (Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003) suggests that such a teaching assignment produces a setting in which the orthodox motive is rife with paradoxes. Students did much work yet could not count that work toward graduation. Joni believed that the students' lives would be best enriched through continued education, yet expressed reservations about offering college as a teleological ideal for fear of widening the gap between her values and those of her students. She hoped to help the students gain the tools they would need for upward social mobility, yet presumed that the level of position within these new professions would be the low-level service arena. She aspired to help her students change social classes, yet feared that they would resent any pejorative assumptions about their present station in life. She found that the students became excited and performed surprisingly well in response to literature instruction that resonated with their personal interests and involved social interaction, yet focused her assessments on students' ability to recall information or gravitate to particular social norms.

These contradictions appear to emerge from a confluence of factors, a contact zone that brought together values emerging from the curriculum, the students' backgrounds, the university's student-centered emphasis, and Joni's and Debbie's paradoxical assumptions and teaching practices. In effect, the school, as embodied by the curriculum, was attempting to overhaul the students' cultural backgrounds and reshape them for participation in a new culture, one with which the students felt ill at ease. We see the views of Eckert (1989) to be relevant in understanding the problems inherent in this task. Eckert argues that working class students are oriented to work, family, friends, and the adult world, making school and its practices appear to them to be a juvenile setting that only delays their entry into adult culture. Joni's Applied Communications students appeared to view their lives as

relatively stable and their teachers' efforts to change them as unwelcome. The students saw blue collar work—perhaps more authoritative in nature as they worked toward independent employment as carpenters, mechanics, and other jobs—as their destination. Such jobs accelerated their ascension into the adult world of work and family and positioned them appropriately according to the expectations of those they admired and emulated.

The curriculum, however, served proleptically to channel them toward professions that required wearing well-shined shoes, preparing a job résumé, learning deference and propriety, and otherwise conforming to orthodox expectations for academic work and job orientation. Whereas the students sought jobs that apprenticed them into work demanding agency—determining which car repairs are necessary, deciding how to reroute ductwork, and engaging in other critical problem-finding and–solving decisions—the curriculum assumed that they should seek office jobs that placed them in less authoritative positions. Whereas the students expressed enthusiasm for team-oriented games and other active learning opportunities, the curriculum designed for them a more compliant, less powerful position in a corporate hierarchy.

Joni, like many early-career teachers, was caught in the midst of these tensions. As Pratt's (1999) notion of a contact zone would predict, the setting of the Applied Communications curriculum included asymmetrical relationships, with one—the curriculum as interpreted by Debbie—having the greatest authority and influence on Joni's teaching. Even though its priorities and emphases ran counter to the values that Joni had developed as a student, that her university professors had tried to impress on her, and that her students voiced, the curriculum ultimately overrode these influences in suggesting which direction Joni's teaching should take during student teaching. The impact of the curriculum should not be a surprise, given that the school had the authority to judge her teaching at this site, making its values paramount. This fact, coupled with Joni's assignment to the school's lowest track as part of her student teaching, elevated the importance of orthodox teaching during this critical period of socialization.

Teacher educators would do well to be aware of this circumstance and its consequences when preparing teacher candidates for the classroom. Teachers work within contradictory environments, even without whatever pressures are provided by university teacher educators and professional associations to employ constructivist methods toward liberatory ends. Teachers are often urged by university professors to teach so that their students develop dispositions leading to agency, such as becoming subversive,

imaginative, liberatory, politically liberated, personally liberated, self-motivated, skeptical, reflective, and inquiring (Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 2000).

At the same time, schools and school districts often develop curricula that suggest, and often reinforce through uniform assessments and scripted lesson plans, that students should all turn out more or less the same (Smagorinsky, Lakly, & Johnson, 2002). And orthodox character curricula of the sort implicitly taught by Joni and frequently instituted in schools (Smagorinsky & Taxel, 2005) stress obedience to authority and compliance over the more liberating qualities encouraged by many teacher educators. The motive of the setting of teaching, then, can be quite muddled, with both explicit and implicit teleological ends and both material and proleptic factors suggesting multiple missions for the institution of school.

As Bickmore et al. (2005) note, the early years of teaching can be so overwhelming that teachers do not even recognize the contradictions in their praxis that follow from their immersion in competing settings and in settings with competing motives (cf. McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005, for other factors that affect beginning teachers). Teacher educators could help beginning teachers to get established by explicitly helping them to identify the notions of good teaching at play in their work settings and outline the theoretical underpinnings and practical consequences of each. Although it might be a bitter pill for some to swallow, teacher educators should also acknowledge that the supervision of beginning teachers is not the best setting in which to resolve conflicts over whose values produce effective teaching, given that the beginning teachers themselves are the most likely casualties in that battle. The two-worlds pitfall described by Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1985) should not ensnare the beginning teacher while freeing the teacher educator to fight again.

We have been criticized in the past for taking a relatively conservative position regarding how to encourage student teachers to value progressive assumptions when school values run counter to them. And yet schools are the destinations of our graduates and must be accommodated to a great extent if our students hope to get started in the profession. We believe, however, that learning to critique and understand the inevitable contradictions that they find in school settings is a useful pedagogical tool. If a tool enables people to act on their environments, then developing the critical awareness of how schools function may enable beginning teachers to construct the setting of their work with an understanding of which competing interests are at work when it appears to them to be a contact zone. It remains up to them then to use this tool for reform, should they be disposed to engage the challenge.

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